
Images of Failure

Xawery Stańczyk

Abstract: On the one hand, the sphere of art offers the possibility to imagine a different, less oppressive and normative world, where just as in the case of cartoons even the greatest gawks, misfits, and outcasts would build friendships and alliances helping them to reach a happy ending. On the other hand, there is something of an artistic performance, at least of an illusionist show, to an intentional act of failure. To perform failure, one has to improvise, to operate randomly, blunderingly, and ostentatiously, as well as to resist the social norms and rules. The artworks that are presented here pertain to all of these meanings of the “art of failure”.

Keywords: image; failure; art of failure; photography; glitch; ugly things

The Queer Art of Failure by Jack Halberstam contains the word “art” in its title by no accident. Halberstam wanders freely, even nonchalantly, through different fields and does not limit his scope of interest only to legitimate culture, yet works of art, whether in the form of radical avant-garde projects or popular children’s cartoons, remain at the centre of the book.

On the one hand, the sphere of art offers the possibility to imagine a different, less oppressive and normative world, where just as in the case of cartoons, even the greatest gawks, misfits, and outcasts would build friendships and alliances helping them to reach a happy ending. Art is also a field in which the act of problematising failure might prove

to be a refreshing grasp that paradoxically leads to success, since the rules of the field reward what keeps them vital. Finally, art provides a chance for testing under specific circumstances the political strategies that seem impossible to apply in strictly political struggle. On the other hand, there is something of an artistic performance, at least of an illusionist show, to an intentional act of failure. To perform failure, one has to improvise, to operate randomly, blunderingly, and ostentatiously, as well as to resist the social norms and rules – to do what, according to the common sense, is silly, unprofessional, and foolish, or even obscene and risky.

The artworks that are presented here pertain to all of these meanings of the “art of failure”. They are a modest and by no means representative selection of pieces submitted in autumn 2016 in response to an open call for:

your unsuccessful works, bad ideas, the results of unrealised plans, documentations of failures, intentional and unintentional errors, crummy photos, silly faces, glitches, defects, examples of a lack of skill, bad taste, a subversive style [sic], things that are ugly, shameful, clumsy, mismatched, involving unfashionable themes, in disgraced aesthetics, weak images.¹

The pieces by Maciej Ratajski, Aleksandra Piękosz, and Elżbieta Łabowska follow the popular

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/events/1747442108844725>

aesthetic of the glitch that is based on deliberate introduction of errors and interferences in order to produce unexpected and potentially attractive modifications. These glitches, however, are unsuccessful, failed, due to either ironic intention or accident and indolence.

The failed glitch, the “poorly” distorted, “improperly” damaged image, like *Barańczak* by Pieńkosz, raises questions about the criteria of beauty and kitsch that come back every time a practice becomes the acceptable convention and no longer a critical experiment. *The Moon* by Weronika Lipszyc likewise redirects our attention to the significance of error in photography: the pictured object, whatever one would think of it, does not look like the moon we know from the evening sky. Pola Dwurnik, in her turn, reveals the function of setbacks in the artist’s workshop and challenges the myth of the genius: even an internationally acclaimed painter may create a most nightmarish watercolour. These things happen.

Piotr Bekas, on the contrary, decides to deliberately botch the composition when he bombs his own photographs. In this way, Bekas reminds us that the author is always present in the picture, even if the public prefers to contemplate “pure” images of architecture or the cityscape. Thus, he ultimately casts suspicion on the medium of photography as such.

Failed images are images of failure as well. Cristina Ferreira exposes this in the photo series *Sleeping Beauties*, depicting young sleeping males, the obvious sign that a party is nearing its end. It is time to get up, to go home or clean up, the party is over. But as far as cleaning is concerned, Laura Waniek in her photographic self-portrait shows her own failure in fighting the mess in the drawer full of unnecessary little bits and pieces, actually trash, associated with a sense of guilt for overconsumption and at the same time an unwillingness to throw out things that one day might become useful again, although they probably won’t.

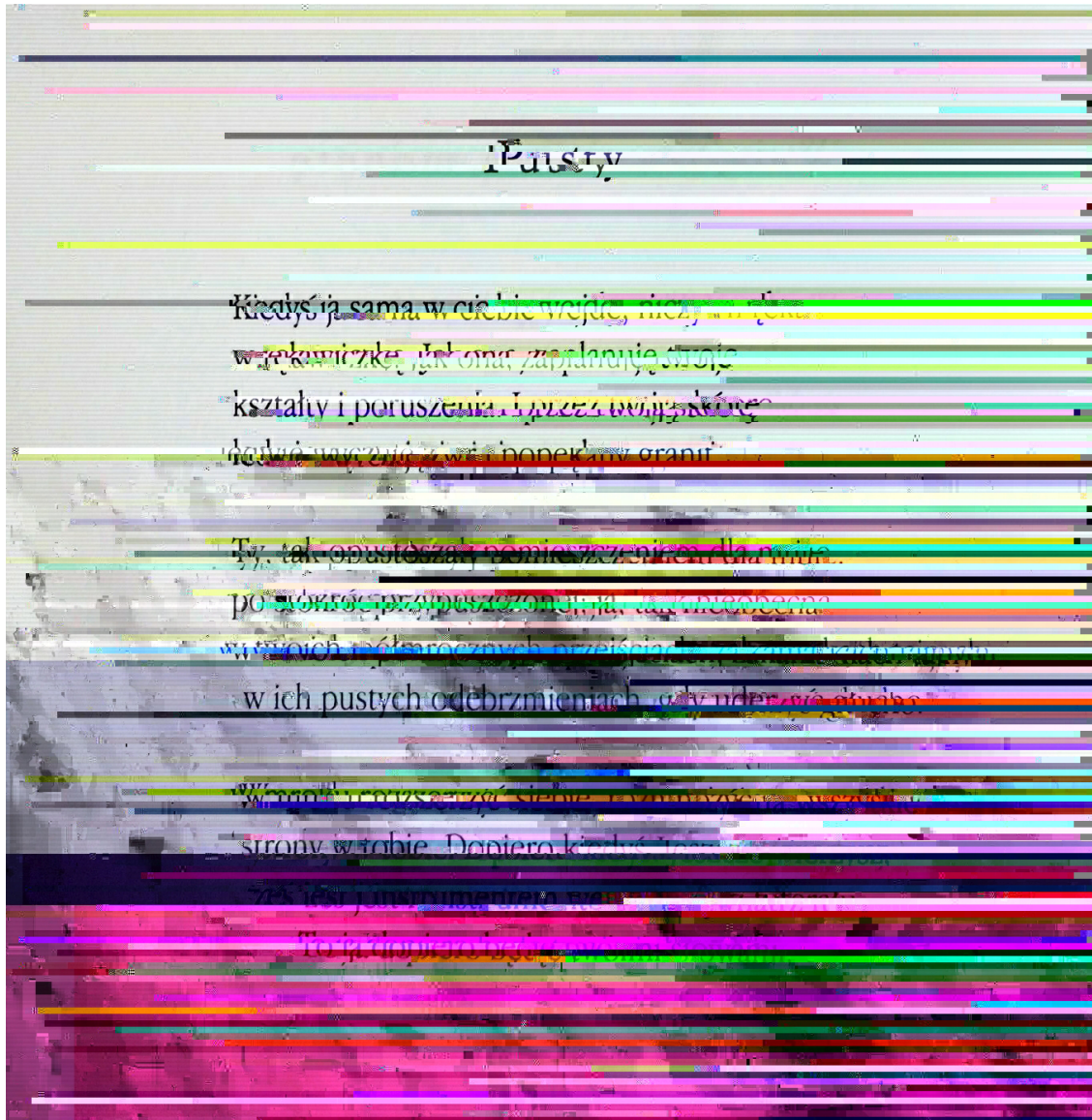
So what remains is an assemblage of images of failure, a forgotten Dropbox folder, files that are not yet thrown to the bin, but their usability is doubtful.

References

Halberstam, J. (2011). *The queer art of failure*. Duke University Press.



Maciej Ratajski CLOUDS



Aleksandra Piękosz BARAŃCZAK (CONFLICTING CODES) [BARAŃCZAK (KONFLIKT KODOWANIA)]



Elżbieta Łabowska WATCHING STROSZEK [OGLĄDAŁAM STROSZKA]



Elżbieta Łabowska WATCHING STROSZEK [OGLĄDAŁAM STROSZKA]



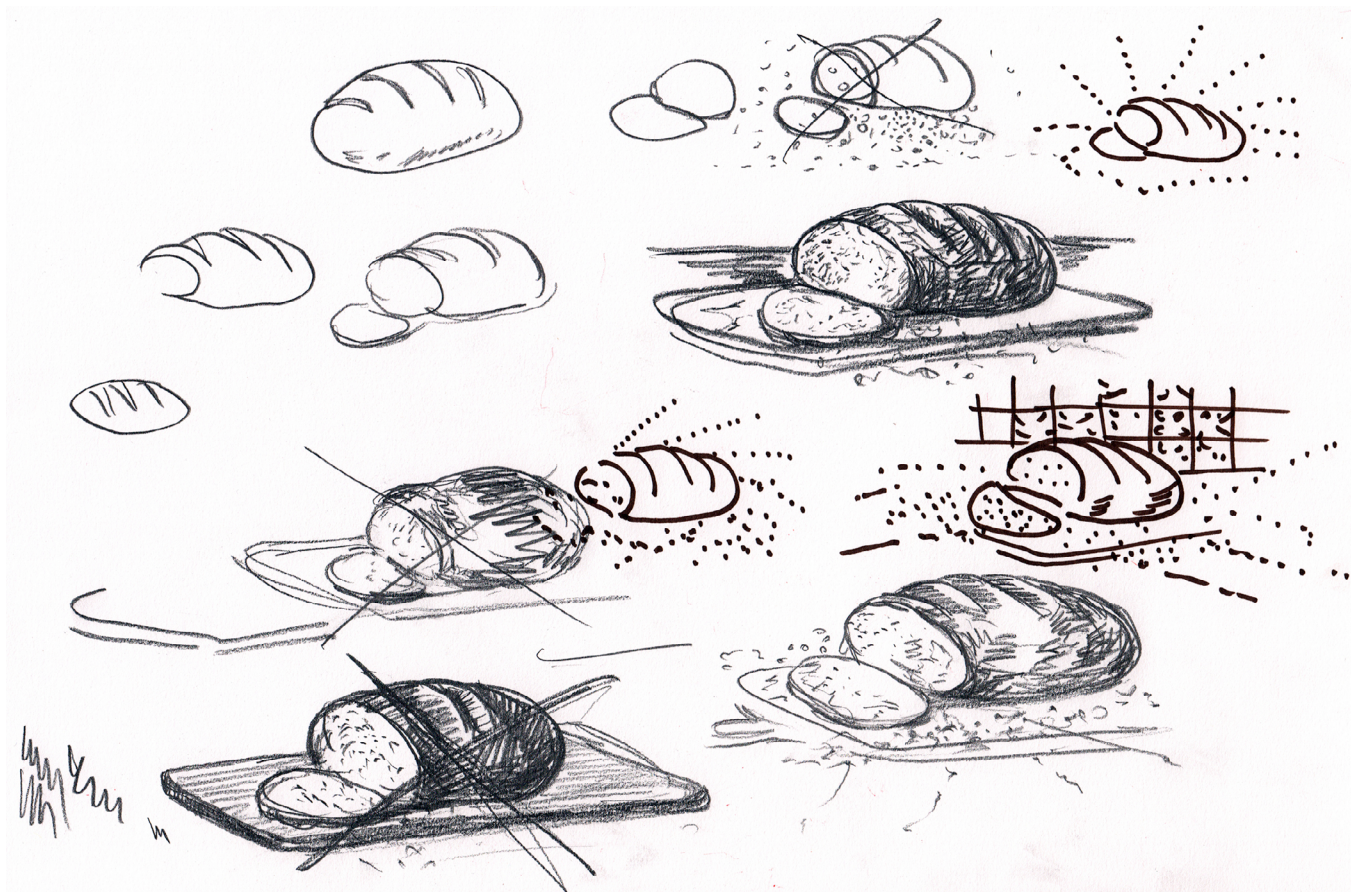
Elżbieta Łabowska WATCHING STROSZEK [OGLĄDAŁAM STROSZKA]



Weronika Lipszyc THE MOON [KSIĘŻYC]



Pola Dwurnik FAILED WATERCOLOUR [NIEUDANA AKWARELA]



Pola Dwurnik FAILED ATTEMPTS AT DRAWING BREAD [NIEUDANE PRÓBY NARYSOWANIA CHLEBA]



Piotr Bekas from the series ON PURPOSE [SPECJALNIE]



Piotr Bekas from the series ON PURPOSE [SPECJALNIE]



Piotr Bekas from the series ON PURPOSE [SPECJALNIE]



Piotr Bekas from the series ON PURPOSE [SPECJALNIE]



Piotr Bekas from the series ON PURPOSE [SPECJALNIE]



Cristina Ferreira SLEEPING BEAUTIES



Cristina Ferreira SLEEPING BEAUTIES



Cristina Ferreira SLEEPING BEAUTIES



Laura Waniek PHOTO [ZDJĘCIE]

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3. Elżbieta Łabowska, Watching Stroszek [Oglądałam Stroszka], e.d.labowska@gmail.com
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Obrazki porażki

Streszczenie: Sztuka jest z jednej strony sferą, w której można wyobrazić sobie inny, mniej opresyjny i normatywny świat; w nim – jak w kreskówkach – międzygatunkowe przyjaźnie i sojusze nawet największych gamoni, odmieńców i wyrzutków prowadzą do szczęśliwego zakończenia. Z drugiej strony w intencjonalnym uprawianiu porażki jest coś ze sztuki, a przynajmniej sztuczki prestidigitatora. Performowanie porażki wymaga zdolności improwizacji, podążania po omacku, dyletanctwa, fanfaronady oraz przeciwstawiania się społecznym normom i regułom. Prezentowane tu prace nawiązują do tych sensów „sztuki porażki”.

Wyrażenia kluczowe: obraz; porażka; sztuka porażki; fotografia; glitch; brzydkie rzeczy



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